

## *Hilda L. Solis*

*1957–*

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

2001–



Image courtesy of the Member

**HILDA LUCIA SOLIS, AN ACCOMPLISHED LEGISLATOR** in the California assembly, was elected to the U.S. House after defeating an 18-year incumbent in the primary. In Congress, Representative Solis has championed the interests of working families and women and has focused on legislation concerning health care and environmental protection.

Hilda Solis was born in Los Angeles, California, on October 20, 1957, the daughter of Raul and Juana Sequiera Solis, who raised seven children. In 1979, she earned a B.A. in political science from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and then worked in the White House Office of Hispanic Affairs during the James Earl “Jimmy” Carter administration. In 1981, she earned an M.A. in public administration from the University of Southern California. Later that year she worked as a management analyst in the civil rights division of the Equal Opportunity Program at the Office of Management and Budget. In June 1982, Solis married her husband, Sam, a small-business owner, and returned to southern California, where she became a field representative in the office of Assemblyman Art Torres. She also worked as the director of the California student opportunity and access program in Whittier from 1982 until 1992. In 1985, Solis was elected a trustee of Rio Hondo Community College, where she served for seven years, winning re-election in 1989. A year later, Solis won election to the California state assembly. From 1994 until 2001, she served as the first Latina elected to the state senate. In the upper chamber she chaired the industrial relations committee, where she led the fight to raise California’s minimum wage standards in 1996. Her environmental justice legislation, the first in the nation to become law, earned her the distinction of a John F. Kennedy “Profiles in Courage” Award. She was the first woman to be so honored.<sup>1</sup>

Solis decided in 2000 to challenge a nine-term Democratic incumbent whose congressional district encompassed much of her state senate district in the San Gabriel Valley. Local labor unions and the state party switched their support to Solis. Portraying herself as an active progressive, she prevailed in the March 7 primary, 62 percent to 29 percent.<sup>2</sup> In the general election she faced no Republican

challenger and captured 80 percent of the vote while three third-party candidates split the remainder. She has easily won re-election twice, earning a third term in the House with 85 percent of the vote in 2004.<sup>3</sup>

When Solis took her seat in the House in January 2001, she won assignments on the Education and Workforce Committee and the Resources Committee. Solis also was tapped as the 107th Congress (2001–2003) Democratic freshman class Whip. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), she took a seat on the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee and became Ranking Member of the Environment and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee. She also was elected Chairwoman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus' Task Force on Health and Democratic Vice Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues. In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), she was re-elected Ranking Member of the Environment and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee and joined the Energy and Air Quality Subcommittee. She was also re-elected chairwoman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus' Task Force on Health and was elected Democratic Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues and chair of the Democratic Women's Working Group, the first Latina to hold such positions.

Solis continued to advance environmental justice when she was elected to Congress. In 2003, her San Gabriel River Watershed Study Act was signed into law. The bill authorized the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resources study of the San Gabriel River to investigate how the federal government can improve the area's recreational and environmental opportunities. In 2005, she authored an amendment to prevent human pesticide testing, which was later enacted into law. Solis also introduced a bill that would ease citizenship requirements for immigrants serving in the U.S. military and for immigrants serving as reservists, as well as provide immigration benefits to their family members. The immigration provisions from Solis's bill were included in a defense authorization bill measure signed into law in December 2003.

Solis also has been a longtime advocate for women's rights. She has been an outspoken leader in raising awareness about a spate of murders, dating to 1993, which have targeted nearly 400 women in the border town of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. She authored a resolution to condemn the murders, to express sympathy to the families of the victims, and to urge the United States to increase its involvement in ending these human rights violations was passed by the House in the 109th Congress.

As chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Health Task Force, she has traveled across the country educating policymakers, advocates, and community leaders about the health needs of the Latino community. In the 109th Congress, Solis was a lead co-author of the bicameral minority health bill titled the Healthcare Equality and Accountability Act.

#### FOR FURTHER READING

*Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress*, "Hilda Solis," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

#### NOTES

- 1 *Almanac of American Politics*, 2002 (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Inc., 2001): 241–242; and "Official Biography of Hilda Solis," <http://www.house.gov/solis/bio.htm> (accessed 21 November 2001).
- 2 Jean Merl and Antonio Olivo, "Solis Trounces Martinez in Bitter Race; Challenger Ousts 18-Year Veteran in a Fight That Split Latino Leadership," 8 March 2000, *Los Angeles Times*: A3.
- 3 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.